

Eastern Colorado

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Why Go?

Although it is tempting to dismiss eastern Colorado on your way to better known destinations, this is a region steeped in Old West history and stocked with gorgeous secrets. Here are dinosaur footprints and old wagon ruts that speak to millions of years of migration.

In addition to brontosaurus families, the Pony Express, Overland Trail and the Santa Fe Trail all blazed through these plains and over nearby mountain passes, as did a half-dozen Native American tribes. Their history is palpable here. The stand-alone Spanish Peaks, with their spectacular dikes erupting from below, are nothing short of spectacular, and if you have the days to spare, shoot the Royal Gorge, go antiquing in Florence, and check into the old-world luxury of one of the Broadmoor, one of America's finest hotels.

Best Places to Eat

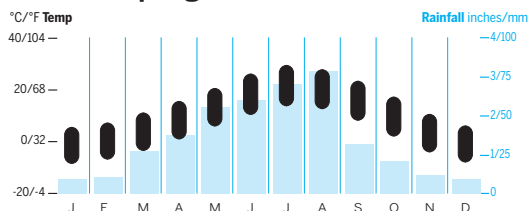
- » Blue Star (p328)
- » Cliff House at Pikes Peak (p327)
- » Hopscotch Bakery (p333)
- » Nana & Nano's (p340)

Best Places to Stay

- » Broadmoor (p327)
- » Cliff House at Pikes Peak (p327)
- » Tarabino Inn (p340)

When to Go?

Colorado Springs



June–August

Hike into the stunning, untrampled and oft-ignored Spanish Peaks Wilderness.

September–November

Hike through hip-high grass in the Pawnee National Grassland.

December–February

Ski, snowshoe or take the railway to Pikes Peak summit.

COLORADO SPRINGS

POP 369,815 / ELEV 6035-7200FT

As beautiful as any city in Colorado, and in many ways the perfect urban allegory for contemporary America, Colorado Springs certainly leaves an impression.

Cradled sweetly below stunning Pikes Peak (visible from all points of town) and erupting with a craggy, striking red-rock vein that juts and runs for more than 10 miles, Colorado Springs does look damn good.

Pinned down with four military bases, it's also a strange and sprawling quilt of neighborhoods that bounce between old (and new) money in Broadmoor to the evangelized planned community that is Briargate, to the hippie stronghold of Manitou Springs, to the progressive old pioneer capitol of Old Colorado City, and finally to a downtown district that offers a mix of fine art, Olympic dreams and, yes, a touch of downbeat desperation.




This is a town that spawned one of the country's first destination resorts. It gave us flame-throwing Hall of Fame relief pitcher Goose Gossage, and nurtured Apollo Ohno to Olympic Stardom. Colorado Springs is where evangelical megachurch pastor Ted Haggard's headline-making sex and drugs scandal played out (and where his comeback was sparked), and where this century's most notorious band of outlaws, the Texas 7, were captured.

Clean and safe, it's a city of athletes and health nuts, adventurers, sober soldiers and flamboyant ice dancers. For better or worse (and it's mostly for the better), here is America in a nutshell, and one of the few places in Colorado where dramatic natural beauty doesn't come with an inflated-for-the-tourist price tag.

Sights

Pikes Peak




MOUNTAIN SUMMIT

(719-385-7325; www.springsgov.com); Pikes Peak; per adult/child/car (5 people) \$12/5/40, cog railway round-trip adult/child \$33/18; ☺9am-3pm winter, 7:30am-8pm Memorial Day-Labor Day, 9am-5pm 1 Oct-Memorial Day;    Cog Railway) At 14,110ft, Pikes Peak may not be one of the tallest of Colorado's 54 14-ers, but it's certainly the most famous. Maybe because it's the only one with a road and a train to the top? That's where you'll find an observation platform and a kitschy gift shop in the Summit House selling Pikes Peak sweaters and hackeysacks, and homemade fudge is for sale in the cafeteria.

Down slope are seven reservoirs – Pikes Peak is the water source for this entire region, and from the summit you can see Kansas, the Oklahoma panhandle, the Wyoming Continental Divide and the Spanish Peaks in New Mexico.

Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center

MUSEUM

(FAC; 719-634-5583; www.csfineartscenter.org; 30 W Dale St; adult/senior & student \$10/8.50; ☺10am-5pm Tue-Sun;    9) This recently re-done \$28-million art museum and 400-seat theatre, opened in 1936. The museum's collection is surprisingly sophisticated, with some terrific Latin American art and photography, and a great series, in the original, pebbled marble wing, by local artist Eric Bransby on the history of navigation. But these are just some of the 23,000 pieces in its permanent collection



There are Mexican clay figures, Native American basketry and quilts, wood-cut prints from social justice artist Leopoldo Mendez, terrific abstract work from local artists such as Vance Kirkland and Floyd Tunson. Its biggest and most famous work is Richard Diebenkorn's *Urbana No. 4*, an abstract that's exhibited around the world.

The sculpture garden and vast lawn out back are great for lounging and occasional concerts, and the Bemis School of Art is attached to the museum. That's the school that gave us Sushe Felix.

The founder of the center was Alice Bemis Taylor, who leaned on her vast connections in the New York art world. And her influence has stuck.

Garden of the Gods

PARK

(719-634-6666; www.gardenofgods.com; 1805 N 30th St; ☺8am-8pm Memorial Day-Labor Day, 9am-5pm Labor Day-Memorial Day;   A compound of 13 bouldered peaks and soaring red-rock pinnacles accessed by a network of concrete paths and trails. From the main parking area you'll see the Kissing Camels, White Rock and Tower of Babel right away. The Cathedral Towers and Sleeping Giant are further on.

It's a great place for families, as little ones love rambling the paths, while lovers snuggle or quarrel in shadows, and resident deer prance among the brush. This land was originally purchased in 1879 by Charles Elliot Perkins. He'd always wanted to make it an official public park and his kids carried out his wishes after his death. It became a park in 1909.